

A gay men's guide to sexually transmitted infections and clinics

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The Manual

# The Manual

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# A booklet for gay men – HIV negative, HIV positive or unsure.

Many of us will get a sexually transmitted infection at some time, even if we have safer sex or sex with only a few men.

But the more men you have sex with, the more likely you are to get infections. You're also more at risk if you don't use condoms.

If you get an infection you should find the information in this manual helpful.

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PART ONE

# Pick me up



# Infections

## What are sexually transmitted infections? .....

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections picked up during sex. They are also called sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

STIs are caused by:

- viruses such as HIV, herpes, hepatitis and warts
- bacteria such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia
- parasites such as crabs and scabies.

You can sometimes get crabs and scabies without having sex, as they can be picked up from bedding, towels and clothes.

## Will safer sex protect me from STIs? .....

Condoms, used properly, are very good at stopping HIV and other STIs being passed on during fucking and sucking. For more on sucking and condoms see the section on HIV on p50.

Sucking and fucking without condoms are the most common ways that STIs are passed on, but they can be spread by other types of sexual contact. STIs are much easier to catch or pass on than HIV.

## Will I know if I have an STI, or if the man I'm having sex with has one? .....

Sometimes you may not notice obvious symptoms. And you can have an infection for quite a long time before any symptoms start to show. Symptoms can also be inside someone's body where they can't be seen, such as when herpes, warts or a syphilis sore are inside someone's arse.

Some men go to a clinic to be checked a couple of times a year. If you have sex with lots of men you might decide to be checked more often. But if you feel there might be something wrong a clinic visit is strongly recommended.

## What can I do if I get an STI? .....

The tests for STIs are quick and easy, and most STIs can be cured. Those that can't be cured (like herpes and HIV) can often be controlled with drugs. You can be vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B.

## What happens if I don't get an STI treated? ....

No STI will cure itself. Even if the symptoms seem to get better, you'll still have an infection. And until you're given the all-clear, you could give the infection to others.

Infections left untreated can end up causing serious health problems or damage to your body. And if you have an STI, you're more likely to pick up or pass on HIV if you have unprotected sex.

## STI tips

### Barriers

Using a barrier makes it less likely that infections will get passed on; for example, you could use a condom for fucking or sucking or a latex glove for fingering or fisting.

### Pissing and drinking

Pissing after sex and drinking lots of water might make it less likely that you'll get some infections in your cock as this can flush bacteria away.

**No sex until the clinic says so**

You can pass on an infection if you have sex before any treatment's finished and before the clinic tells you it's safe. You'll be told by the clinic if they want you to come back so that they can check the treatment has worked.

**Finishing the tablets**

You could still have an infection unless you finish the whole course of tablets that you've been given, even if symptoms go away.

**Sharing tablets**

Sharing tablets with someone else means that neither of you will have enough medicine to clear your infection up properly. And someone else's medicine could be the wrong treatment for what you have.

**Telling others**

Telling people you've had sex with that you've got an infection lets them know that they need to get checked themselves. Clinic staff can talk to you about ways of doing this which you feel comfortable with (see p69).

**Sex toys**

Sex toys, like dildos, that are used on more than one person can spread infections, even in dried blood. Cover them with a new condom when used on a different person or wash them with warm soapy water.

**A clean start**

If you're starting a new relationship, it's a good idea for both of you to get checked for infections.

**Seeing your doctor**

If you're thinking of going to your GP (not a clinic) about STIs, HIV tests, hepatitis vaccinations, etc., you might want to think about the pros and cons of your doctor treating you. You can read more about this on p60-61.

**If you have HIV**

It's a fact that if you're HIV positive:

- **having an untreated STI can cause more HIV to be made in your body. This could affect your health. It might also make it more likely that you'll pass on HIV if you have unprotected sex**
- **if HIV has weakened your immune system, you may be more likely to pick up STIs**
- **a weaker immune system makes some STIs (like thrush and molluscum) more common in people with HIV. Others (like herpes or warts) might be harder to treat and symptoms might be worse**
- **a lot of gay men who get syphilis have HIV too. Ask your sexual health or HIV clinic for a syphilis blood test every six months, especially if you have sex with lots of men**
- **unprotected sex makes you more likely to pick up STIs. Men with HIV who have anal sex without condoms make up a very large number of cases of syphilis, lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV) and hepatitis C (see p18, 20 and 39 for more information)**
- **if you have HIV you can still be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B (see p36 and p39 for more details).**

# Tell-tale signs

The symptoms of each STI aren't the same for everyone, but this chart gives a rough guide to how infections often show themselves. Trying to diagnose yourself isn't a good idea and all STIs (except scabies, crabs and threadworm) need to be treated by a doctor or clinic.

	Chlamydia	Crabs	Gonorrhoea	Gut infections	Hepatitis	Herpes	HIV	LGV	Molluscum	NSU	Scabies	Syphilis	Threadworm	Thrush	Warts
<b>Cock</b>															
Discharge from cock	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Pain when peeing	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
Sore or blister on cock	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	●	○	○	○
Itching in or on cock	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Small growths on cock	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	●

## Arse

Sore or blister in or around arse	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Growths in or around arse	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	●
Discharge from arse	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pain or inflammation in arse or when shitting	●	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Itching in or around arse	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

## Throat

Sore or blister in or around mouth or throat	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sore throat	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Some of these symptoms can be caused by other common infections, like colds or flu. And you can have any of the infections in this manual and not notice any symptoms.

Health advisers at clinics can answer any questions you have about infections and their signs and symptoms over the phone or in person.

## Rest of body

	Chlamydia	Crabs	Gonorrhoea	Gut infections	Hepatitis	Herpes	HIV	LGV	Molluscum	NSU	Scabies	Syphilis	Threadworm	Thrush	Warts
<b>Rest of body</b>															
Rash	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Swollen glands	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pain in balls	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pain in stomach	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Itching on skin	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Growths on skin	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Diarrhoea	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Losing a lot of weight	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Aches/flu-like illness/fever	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Skin or whites of eyes turn yellow	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pale shit or dark piss	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Extreme tiredness	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
White 'threads' in shit	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Grey or white patches in mouth	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

## How common are STIs?

Infections are getting more common among both gay and straight people.

Your chances of getting an STI can depend on:

- how many men you have sex with
- what type of sex you have
- whether you use condoms or not.

A survey of gay men in 2000\* asked if they'd had an STI in the previous year. Out of every 100 men 14 said 'yes' and 86 said 'no'.

Of those 14 saying 'yes':

- five said they'd had gonorrhoea or NSU
- four said they'd had crabs
- one said they'd had scabies
- one said they'd had genital/anal warts
- three reported other STIs (HIV, herpes, syphilis, hepatitis, chlamydia, thrush, gut infections, molluscum), although none of these infections were reported by more than one man in every 200.

Men with more sexual partners are much more likely to report picking up an infection. In the survey men who'd had sex with 30 or more men a year were 10 times more likely to get an infection than men with one partner in a year. These figures are just a guide. You could get an infection that's rare, but never get one of the common ones. Since this survey there has been a big rise in many of the infections (especially syphilis).

*\*All statistics in this booklet come from: the 1998 and 2000 National Gay Men's Sex Surveys (Sigma Research) and the Health Protection Agency.*



## Bacteria

**Bacteria are easy to treat as they are killed by antibiotics. When this happens the infection has gone from your body. It will only come back if you get infected again.**



# Gonorrhoea

## How common is it? .....

Gonorrhoea (also known as 'the clap') is one of the most common infections. In the 2000 survey three in 100 gay men reported getting this in the previous year. Among men with 30 or more partners a year nearly one in 10 reported getting it. Around 6,000 UK gay men were treated in clinics for this infection in 2006.

## What causes gonorrhoea? .....

Gonorrhoea is caused by bacteria that live on moist, warm parts of the body such as the inside of the arse, mouth, throat and urethra (the 'pipe' in your cock that you piss down). It's easy to pick up or pass on.

## What are the symptoms of gonorrhoea? .....

Symptoms can start around two to seven days after being infected. But there may be no symptoms, especially with gonorrhoea of the throat or arse.

Gonorrhoea in the cock:

- **can cause a white/yellow discharge and pain when pissing**
- **you might want to piss but can't, or only a little.**

In the arse:

- **there may be discharge on your shit or pain when shitting but usually you won't notice symptoms.**

In the throat it can sometimes cause a sore throat.

## How is gonorrhoea passed on? .....

Through unprotected:

- **fucking or being fucked**
- **sucking or being sucked**
- **rimming.**

Gonorrhoea can be spread by getting the bacteria on your fingers, then touching other parts of your own body.

## How is gonorrhoea prevented? .....

Using a condom greatly reduces the risk of gonorrhoea being picked up or passed on.

## How is gonorrhoea treated? .....

It is diagnosed by testing a sample of your piss or taking a swab from the infected area.

You'll be given antibiotics in tablet form - often just one pill. Or you might be given a liquid or injection.

Untreated gonorrhoea can cause serious damage to your balls (known as epididymitis), arthritis and prostatitis (long-term inflammation inside the arse).

No-one is immune to gonorrhoea. If you've had it before, you can get it again.

# Non-specific urethritis (NSU)

## How common is NSU? .....

NSU stands for non-specific urethritis and is sometimes called non-gonococcal urethritis (NGU).

It is one of the most common STIs. Two in 100 gay men reported getting this in the previous year, but among those with 30 or more partners a year it was six in every 100. In 2006, over 7,000 UK gay men were treated in clinics for NSU.

### What causes NSU? .....

'Urethritis' means 'inflammation in the urethra', the pipe in your dick that piss comes down. It's usually caused by bacteria that live in the arse, cock and mouth but you only get NSU in your cock.

NSU is called '*non-specific urethritis*' because usually the exact cause isn't known, but often it's caused by chlamydia.

### What are the symptoms of NSU? .....

There may be no symptoms. But around 10 to 20 days after getting infected you might notice a white-ish discharge or a burning feeling when pissing.

### How is NSU passed on? .....

Through unprotected:

- **fucking or being fucked**
- **sucking or being sucked.**

Also, lots of sex or wanking can cause NSU through inflammation of the urethra.

### How is NSU prevented? .....

Using condoms will greatly reduce the risk of NSU being picked up or passed on.

### How is NSU treated? .....

A sample of your piss is examined or a swab is taken from your urethra. NSU can be cured by antibiotics, either using just one pill or by taking pills for a week or two.

Untreated NSU can cause serious damage to your balls (known as epididymitis), arthritis or prostatitis (long-term inflammation inside the arse).

No-one is immune to NSU. If you've had it before, you can get it again.

## Chlamydia

### How common is chlamydia? .....

Although chlamydia is often thought of as being more of a problem for straight people, around 5,500 UK gay men were treated for it in 2006.

### What causes chlamydia? .....

Chlamydia is caused by bacteria. It normally affects the urethra, but can be in the arse and throat.

### What are the symptoms of chlamydia? .....

Many people don't notice symptoms. But 10 to 20 days after getting infected you might notice:

- **a discharge from the cock or arse**
- **pain when pissing**
- **pain in the arse or balls.**

### How is chlamydia passed on? .....

Through unprotected:

- **fucking or being fucked**
- **sucking or being sucked**
- **rimming.**

## How is chlamydia prevented? .....

Using a condom greatly reduces the risk that chlamydia is picked up or passed on.

## How is chlamydia treated? .....

A sample of your piss is tested or a swab taken from your urethra.

Antibiotics cure the infection – one tablet or a course lasting a week or two.

Untreated chlamydia can cause serious damage to your balls (known as epididymitis), arthritis or prostatitis (long-term inflammation inside the arse).

No-one is immune to chlamydia. If you've had it before, you can get it again.

## Lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV)

### How common is LGV? .....

Once almost unheard of in this country, cases of this tropical infection were first seen among UK gay men in 2004. Since then over 500 gay men have been treated for LGV.

### What causes LGV? .....

LGV is caused by a type of chlamydia bacteria that attacks the lymph glands.

### What are the symptoms of LGV? .....

Symptoms aren't always noticeable and doctors sometimes mistake them for other conditions.

LGV has three stages.

#### FIRST STAGE

Around four days to a month after getting infected a small, painless sore may appear on your cock, in your mouth or arse. You may have some discharge and pain on pissing.

#### SECOND STAGE

About four days to several months later your glands may become painfully swollen, with fever and feeling ill. If you have the infection:

- **in your cock you may get discharge and swollen glands in your groin**
- **in your mouth you may get swollen glands in your neck or armpit**
- **in your arse you may have painful inflammation (known as proctitis), with blood or pus coming from it, constipation, abscesses and pain when shitting.**

Most infections have been in the arse.

#### THIRD STAGE

Left untreated, LGV can cause serious lasting damage to your arse and cock that may need surgery.

### How is LGV passed on? .....

Through unprotected:

- **fucking or being fucked**
- **fisting or being fisted**
- **sucking or being sucked.**

Using things like dildos on more than one man's arse can also spread the infection.

## How is LGV prevented? .....

You can reduce the risk of LGV by:

- using a condom
- using latex gloves for fisting
- covering dildos with a fresh condom each time you use them and washing them with warm soapy water afterwards.

If several men are having sex, fresh condoms and latex gloves are needed for each man they're used with.

## How is LGV treated? .....

A sample of piss or a swab from the affected area is tested for chlamydia. If positive, further tests are done to look for LGV.

A three-week course of antibiotics cures LGV as long as it is caught before stage 3.

If you have any inflammation in your arse, a check-up is essential and you should avoid having sex until the doctor or clinic tells you it's alright.

No-one is immune to LGV. If you have had it before, you can get it again.

# Syphilis

## How common is syphilis? .....

Syphilis was very uncommon in Britain until recently. But in the last 10 years there has been a big rise in infections. It's more common among those with lots of sex partners, particularly in saunas, sex clubs and cruising areas.

In 2006, around 2,500 gay men were treated for syphilis in UK clinics. But many men remain untreated because they don't know they have it.

## What causes syphilis? .....

Syphilis is caused by bacteria that live in warm, moist parts of the body such as inside the mouth, arse and cock. It's easy to pick up and easy to pass on.

## What are the symptoms of syphilis? .....

The disease follows three stages, each with its own symptoms. But symptoms of syphilis don't always show. Many men diagnosed with syphilis never realised they had it until they got tested.

### *First stage (Primary syphilis)*

- Two to four weeks after getting infected a painless red sore (known as a chancre – pronounced 'shanker') can appear either on your cock or in your mouth, throat or arse. It will heal and go away.
- The glands nearest to the sore (in the neck or groin) may swell up.

### *Second stage (Secondary syphilis)*

- Weeks or a few months later a body rash can appear, often on your palms of your hands or soles of your feet. You might also get a fever, headaches or feel ill.
- You may get warty growths around your arse, or ulcers or grey patches of skin in your mouth or on your cock.

### *Third stage (Tertiary syphilis)*

- Years later syphilis can cause serious damage to your heart, brain and nervous system. Syphilis is usually spotted before this third stage and is very rare.

## How is syphilis passed on? .....

You can get syphilis by coming into contact with the sores of the first stage or skin rash of the second stage.

Unless treated syphilis can be passed on for up to two years through unprotected:

- **fucking or being fucked**
- **sucking or being sucked**
- **fingering**
- **fisting.**

## How is syphilis prevented? .....

Using a condom for fucking and sucking prevents contact with the infectious sores or skin rashes/patches on someone's cock or in their arse or mouth. But this doesn't guarantee protection as syphilis bacteria will be in any sore or rash not covered by the condom.

Touching the rash or sores should be avoided. Latex gloves for fisting will stop contact with sores in someone's arse.

## How is syphilis treated? .....

Clinics usually check everyone's blood for syphilis. And if there's a sore, fluid in it is tested.

Antibiotics are given as a single injection or up to two weeks of injections or tablets. Once treated, a blood test checks that the syphilis has been cured.

No-one is immune to syphilis. If you have had it before, you can get it again.



## Other infections

(Parasites, fungal and gut infections)

**Parasites are small creatures that live on or inside your body. Some, like crabs, are big enough to see. Others, like the ones that cause gut infections, can't be seen.**

**Some, such as threadworm or crabs, don't harm you but can be a nuisance. Other parasites, such as ones that cause gut infections, can do serious damage if left untreated. Some gut infections are caused by bacteria.**

**Fungal infections, such as thrush, are caused by a sort of mould that lives on warm, moist skin in the mouth or on the cock.**

# Crabs

## How common are crabs? .....

Crabs (also called pubic lice) are the most common sexually transmitted infection. In our survey, four in 100 gay men reported having had them in the previous year. Most people treat themselves at home.

## What causes crabs? .....

Crabs are easy to pick up. The lice are small, crab-shaped insects that are the size of a pin-head when fully grown. They live on body hair and feed on blood (but they cannot pass on HIV).

The lice are found:

- in the hair around your balls, arse and cock
- on underarm hair, hairy legs and chests
- sometimes in eyebrows and hair on the face.

They aren't found in the hair on your head.

The lice can live away from the body for about 24 hours, so they can survive on clothes, bedding and towels.

## What are the symptoms of crabs? .....

You could have crabs and not notice them. But two to three weeks after infection the lice usually cause itching, especially at night, and sometimes cause a rash.

You can often see fully-grown lice on the hair, but probably not if you've just been infected.

## How are crabs passed on? .....

Crabs are passed on by:

- body contact during sex
- using the towels, bedding or clothes of someone with crabs (this is not common but it can happen).

If someone has crabs, it doesn't necessarily mean that they got them by having sex with someone else.

## How are crabs prevented? .....

There's no way of stopping yourself getting crabs. But if you have them you can prevent them spreading by:

- making sure that people who've shared your bed, towels or clothes are also treated
- washing your bedding, towels and clothes on a hot wash which kills the lice and their eggs
- dry-cleaning any leather clothing.

## How are crabs treated? .....

Treating crabs is cheap, easy and can be done at home using a lotion such as Quellada, Derbac, Prioderm and Lyclear. These can be bought from a chemist without a prescription or you can get lotions free at GUM clinics. You put the lotion over your whole body (but not on your head or face), leave it on for 24 hours and pick off any lice you see left on your body.

If the treatment doesn't work ask at a GUM clinic for advice.

Shaving off pubic hair will not get rid of crabs.

No-one is immune to crabs. If you've had them before, you can get them again.

# Scabies

## How common is scabies? .....

Scabies is one of the more common infections, because it is easily passed on through skin contact. About one in 100 gay men reported catching scabies in the previous year. Most men treat themselves at home or their doctor treats them.

## What causes scabies? .....

Scabies is an infection of the skin caused by tiny parasitic mites. They burrow under the skin, causing itching.

## What are the symptoms of scabies? .....

The mites can't be seen, and some people only get very mild itching which they don't realise is due to scabies. For some people the itching can be intense, usually starting two to six weeks after infection.

The mites burrowing under the skin can leave red lines, especially between your fingers and around the wrists. The mites can also be found on your feet, buttocks, stomach, arse, cock and balls.

## How is scabies passed on? .....

Scabies is easily passed on through body contact during sex. It can also be passed on through sharing clothes, towels and bedding, but this is unlikely.

## How is scabies prevented? .....

There's no way to stop yourself getting scabies, but if you have it you can prevent it spreading by:

- **making sure that people who you've had sex with, or who've shared your bed, towels or clothes, are also treated**
- **washing any clothing, bedding and towels on a hot wash**
- **dry-cleaning any leather clothing.**

## How is scabies treated? .....

Treating scabies can be done at home using a lotion such as Quellada. You can get these cheaply from a chemist without a prescription or free at GUM clinics. You spread the lotion over your whole body, including the palms of your hands, soles of your feet and between your fingers and toes (but not your face or head), and leave it on for 24 hours. A second treatment may be needed a week later.

Even when the treatment works you may still itch for several weeks. But if you still itch after two weeks, a GUM clinic will advise you what to do.

Whatever happens, only repeat the treatment if a doctor tells you to, as too much lotion can irritate your skin.

No-one is immune to scabies. If you've had it before, you can get it again.

# Gut infections

## How common are gut infections? .....

It's often difficult to know whether gut infections have come from general stomach bugs, food poisoning or sex. Clinics don't count how many people they treat for gut infections and people often go to their doctor for treatment.

Men who rim, especially if they rim a lot of men, will be more likely to get gut infections.

## What causes gut infections? .....

A large number of bacteria cause them, leading to diarrhoea or stomach pains. Bacterial gut infections include shigellosis (caused by shigella) and salmonellosis (caused by salmonella). Some gut infections are caused by parasites, such as threadworm, amoebiasis (caused by amoebas) and giardiasis (caused by giardia).

## What are the symptoms of gut infections? .....

Symptoms can include:

- diarrhoea
- stomach cramps
- farting
- fever
- blood in the diarrhoea
- losing weight.

With threadworms, you might:

- feel itching around and inside your arse
- see the worms in your shit, looking like short threads of white cotton.

## How are gut infections passed on? .....

Gut infections can be passed on by food-poisoning and by getting tiny amounts of shit on your fingers and in your mouth. This can happen during:

- rimming
- fucking
- fingering
- fisting
- scat
- handling used dildos or condoms.

Threadworms are caught when the invisible worm eggs get on your fingers and then into your mouth. They are spread in the same way as gut infections.

## How are gut infections prevented? .....

You can prevent gut infections by:

- avoiding contact with tiny amounts of shit during sex
- using latex gloves for fisting and fingering, or a latex barrier (such as a condom cut into a square) for rimming
- washing your hands after handling used condoms or after sex involving arse play.

You might decide to cut down on rimming or not rim at all.

## How are gut infections treated? .....

If you think you've got a gut infection from rimming, you need to say you've been rimming so that your doctor knows which tests to carry out. If you don't tell the doctor then they won't test for the right things, you won't get treated, leaving the infection to cause serious damage.



To find out what infection you've got, a sample of your shit will be tested. Any partners should also be checked and/or treated to stop you being re-infected.

Antibiotics have to be used for some infections. Anti-diarrhoea treatments may make some gut infections worse.

Threadworms are treated by taking cheap tablets or powders available in chemists without a prescription.

Gut infections can cause serious problems if HIV has weakened your immune system. Sometimes the infections can be very difficult to get rid of.

## Thrush

### How common is thrush? .....

Thrush (also called candidiasis) is more a problem for women, who can give it to the men they have sex with. Gay men can get it, but it's rare unless you have HIV.

### What causes thrush? .....

Thrush usually happens when too much of your body's own natural fungus grows in your mouth or on your cock and sometimes in your arse. Sometimes it's sexually transmitted but often it occurs on its own.

### What are the symptoms of thrush? .....

There may be no symptoms, but there could be:

- itching and a rash or inflammation
- pain during sex or when pissing
- sticky white patches on your skin or in your mouth
- redness and soreness in or around your arse or cock.

### How is thrush passed on? .....

Through unprotected:

- fucking or being fucked
- fingering.

There's a small risk from sucking or being sucked.

### How is thrush prevented? .....

Using a condom prevents contact with the infected area.

Don't touch the affected part of someone else's body if they have thrush, or the affected part of your own body if you have it.

### How is thrush treated? .....

It can be treated with anti-fungal creams or tablets.

If you have thrush any regular partner(s) should be checked. They could have it without showing symptoms and give it back to you.



## Viruses

**Viruses cannot be cured by medicines. They are tricky to treat as antibiotics have no effect and it's very hard to make vaccines against them.**

Eventually your body's own immune system will deal with a virus, either killing it off or keeping it under control. Some viruses may stay in your body for years (like warts) or even a lifetime (like HIV or herpes).

**A virus is more likely to cause symptoms when your immune system isn't managing to keep it under control.**

## Hepatitis

### What causes hepatitis? .....

Hepatitis means 'inflammation of the liver' and it can be caused by viruses passed on during sex. Different viruses cause different types of hepatitis, some of which are more serious than others.

Hepatitis A, B and C are the most common viruses. Vaccinations can protect against hepatitis A and B. A combined vaccine protects against both A and B.

## Hepatitis A

### How common is hepatitis A? .....

Many gay men have had hepatitis A, which is why many clinics offer free vaccination against it. Most people with hepatitis A are diagnosed by their doctor. Many people have mild symptoms, recover and don't even realise they've had it.

Hepatitis A is usually the least serious of the three main types of hepatitis, but it can still make you very ill. There are sometimes outbreaks among gay men and it's easy to pick up. People travelling in countries with poor hygiene risk getting it too.

### What causes hepatitis A? .....

Hepatitis A is caused by a virus found in shit. It's spread when tiny amounts of shit get into your mouth.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis A? .....

Symptoms can be mild, so you may not realise you have hepatitis A. But up to six weeks after being infected you may feel mild flu-like symptoms.

You can also:

- have a fever or diarrhoea
- feel sick or very tired
- lose weight
- feel pain in the stomach
- feel sick when faced with tobacco smoke, fatty food and alcohol
- have itchy skin.

You may get jaundice, which means:

- your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow
- your shit goes a pale colour
- your piss is dark-coloured.

The illness can last for many weeks, taking months to get your strength back. You'll be most infectious before symptoms show.

### How is hepatitis A passed on? .....

The virus, contained in shit, needs to get into your mouth to infect you. Minute traces of shit can be left on your hands and on food prepared by an infectious person. Water can also become contaminated, especially abroad.

During sex, shit can get on your fingers and in your mouth through:

- rimming
- fingering
- fucking without condoms
- handling used condoms and dildos.

### How is hepatitis A prevented? .....

You can protect yourself by **getting vaccinated**. These might also reduce the risk:

- avoiding any sex involving contact with shit
- using condoms for fucking
- washing your hands after handling used condoms or dildos, or fingering someone
- using a latex barrier between the arse and mouth of you and the man you're rimming
- using latex gloves and water-based lube when fisting or fingering.

### Vaccinations

Vaccination against hepatitis A gives protection that can last up to 10 years or longer. It involves two injections. The second is usually given 6 months after the first.

You might be given a blood test before you are vaccinated which shows if you've picked up the virus already. If you have, you're now immune, can't get hepatitis A again and don't need the vaccine.

### Where to get vaccinated

The hepatitis A vaccination is free and you can get it from your GP or a GUM clinic. GPs can vaccinate people travelling to countries outside Europe where hepatitis A is a problem. Your GP may also give the vaccination if you say you're gay, but you might not want your doctor knowing this or putting it on your notes. A lot of GUM clinics give the vaccination, but many don't. Ask around to find which clinics offer it.

If a clinic says no, they may change their mind if you insist. Remind them that government guidelines state gay men are at risk and should be vaccinated.

### Vaccination and HIV

You can be safely vaccinated if you have HIV. Vaccines have a short-lived effect on your viral load, so tell the person vaccinating you that you have HIV and let the doctor treating you for HIV know that you're being vaccinated.

### How is hepatitis A treated? .....

The treatment for hepatitis A is plenty of rest, which can mean many weeks off sick. Your doctor will tell you how long you should avoid drinking alcohol for while your liver recovers. And you'll need to avoid recreational drugs.

A blood test can show when you've fully recovered.

## Hepatitis B

### How common is hepatitis B? .....

Many gay men have had hepatitis B, which is why clinics offer free vaccination against it. Most are diagnosed with it by their doctor.

Hepatitis B is very infectious and can easily be passed on during sex. Many people get it without realising. For others it can mean months of feeling ill and not being able to drink alcohol. For a few people who get it, it will be fatal.

### What causes hepatitis B? .....

Hepatitis B is caused by a virus that attacks the liver. It's found in body fluids like blood, cum and spit.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis B? .....

Many people have no obvious symptoms. But weeks or several months after getting infected you may get a flu-like illness which can be mild or more severe.

Other symptoms can include:

- fever
- headaches
- feeling exhausted
- having no appetite
- being sick
- feeling pain in your stomach
- itchy skin.

You may get jaundice, which means:

- your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow
- your shit goes a pale colour
- your piss is dark-coloured.

The vast majority of people get over their symptoms, suffer no lasting damage and stop being infectious. About one in 10 people who get the virus become 'carriers', which means that they feel fine but can still infect other people. Carriers run a small risk of getting liver cancer.

Around one in 100 people who get hepatitis B die from it.

### How is hepatitis B passed on? .....

The virus is usually in:

- blood
- cum
- pre-cum.

The virus is a lot more infectious than HIV, so it's much easier to get or pass on through sex. It can be passed on through unprotected:

- **fucking or being fucked**
- **sucking**
- **rimming.**

It could also be passed on by sharing toothbrushes or razors (they could have infected blood on them).

The virus can be in spit and piss, so it's possible it could be passed on through kissing and water sports, but this isn't common.

### How is hepatitis B prevented? .....

You can protect yourself by **getting vaccinated**. The risk might be reduced by using condoms for fucking and sucking.

#### Vaccination

Gay men are at greater risk of hepatitis B, so GUM clinics offer free vaccinations. Some GPs also give the vaccine but this means telling your GP you're gay and you might not want this to go on your medical notes.

You might be given a blood test before you're vaccinated which shows if you've already had hepatitis B. If you have, you're now immune, can't get it again and don't need the vaccine.

The vaccinations are given as two or three injections over six months. You only get full protection if you have all the injections. A blood test after the last injection shows if the vaccine has worked, which it does for about 95% of people. After five years, you'll need a booster injection.

The older you are, or if you have HIV, the less effective vaccination can be. You might lose your protection sooner.

#### Vaccination and HIV

You can be safely vaccinated if you have HIV. Vaccines have a short-lived effect on your viral load, so tell the person vaccinating you that you have HIV and let the doctor treating you for HIV know that you're being vaccinated.

### How is hepatitis B treated? .....

You may need plenty of rest if you get hepatitis B, which can mean many weeks off sick. You may have to stop drinking alcohol and avoid recreational drugs for up to a year while your liver recovers.

If tests show you're a carrier, drugs may be able to control the virus.

## Hepatitis C

### How common is hepatitis C? .....

Hepatitis C is the most serious type of hepatitis. It has only been known about for a few years.

In this country hepatitis C is a common and growing problem among people who inject drugs. It's nowhere near as common among gay men as hepatitis A and B. But gay men with HIV are more likely to get it. This can be because of injecting drugs in the past or unprotected sex that involves coming into contact with another man's blood.

### What causes hepatitis C? .....

Hepatitis C is caused by a virus that seems to be not very easily passed on through sex.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis C? .....

Very few people notice any symptoms when first infected with hepatitis C. Even over time symptoms are difficult to spot, and it can take years before you begin to feel ill. But eventually it can cause the same symptoms as hepatitis A and B. Extreme tiredness, mental confusion and depression can also be symptoms.

Many people with untreated hepatitis C eventually develop some kind of liver disease, such as liver cancer. You may need a liver transplant.

Hepatitis C can be fatal.

## How is hepatitis C passed on? .....

The virus is mainly in blood and is spread when infected blood gets into another person's body. But it could be spread through cum.

It can be passed on through:

- **anal sex if condoms aren't used, especially as bleeding can happen during fucking and fisting**
- **injecting drugs if equipment is shared.**

Having HIV and hepatitis C can make your blood and cum more infectious for hepatitis C. Blood transfusions are now safe as donations are checked for hepatitis C.

## How is hepatitis C prevented? .....

There's no vaccine for hepatitis C. These reduce the risk:

- **using a condom for anal sex**
- **using latex gloves for fisting**
- **avoid sharing toothbrushes and razors with someone you know has the hepatitis C virus**
- **not sharing equipment when injecting drugs.**

## How is hepatitis C treated? .....

Infection is confirmed through a blood test which looks for hepatitis C antibodies: these can take up to six months to appear in the blood.

Treatment lasts six to 12 months and involves the drugs Pegylated Alpha Interferon and Ribavirin. This is successful for about half of people treated.

Hepatitis C may get worse quicker if you have HIV as well. If you have both infections you and your doctor may have to decide which illness needs treating first, as HIV drugs and hepatitis C infection can both damage the liver.

For more information about hepatitis see p78-79.

# Herpes

## How common is herpes? .....

In 2006 over 1,000 gay men were treated at UK clinics for genital or anal herpes. This figure doesn't include men who get blisters from time to time but don't go to clinics for treatment.

## What causes herpes? .....

Herpes is caused by two types of the herpes simplex virus. Both types can cause blisters, usually on the moist skin:

- **in or around the mouth (cold sores)**
- **on or around the cock or inside the arse (genital or anal herpes).**

During sex both types of the virus can be passed from one part of your body to someone else's. For example, if someone with a cold sore sucks another man's cock it can lead to herpes blisters on that cock.

Many of us have been infected with one or both of the two herpes simplex viruses without knowing. This is because our immune system often stops the virus causing any problems.

### What are the symptoms of herpes? .....

You may not notice symptoms of herpes until many months, or even years, after sex with an infected person. These symptoms can include:

- blisters where it first got into your body (usually on your cock or mouth or in your throat or arse)
- flu-like aches and pains
- swollen glands.

Itching, tingling or redness in the affected area may warn you blisters are about to appear. Blisters hold an infectious clear fluid. The blister bursts, scabs over and heals in 10 to 14 days.

This might be the first and last time you get the blisters. But if they come back, it'll be to the same part of your body as before. Usually they won't be as bad as the first time, but they may still be painful.

### How is herpes passed on? .....

The virus is passed on by skin contact with someone's herpes sores through:

- fucking or being fucked without condoms
- sucking or being sucked
- rimming or being rimmed
- wanking or fingering someone with blisters on their cock or in their arse
- contact with cold sores in or around the mouth (for example, during kissing or oral sex).

The virus can be in the spit of someone with cold sores. It can sometimes be passed on through contact with skin that has no blisters.

### How is herpes prevented? .....

You can reduce the risk of herpes by:

- avoiding sex if you or your partner has a cold sore or herpes blister
- avoiding sex if you feel a blister coming on, as the virus is in the skin just before the blisters appear
- using condoms helps stop herpes if it acts as a barrier against the part of the body with the blister
- washing hands if blisters are touched and before handling contact lenses
- if you have a cold sore, not using your spit as a lubricant during sex or when putting contact lenses in.

### How is herpes treated? .....

The herpes virus stays in your body, but your immune system should keep it under control most of the time and clear up blisters if they happen.

If blisters appear:

- bathing in salt water eases the pain, as do pain-killing products such as Solarcaine or Xylocaine spray or cream
- special tablets and creams prescribed by a doctor can make the blisters go away more quickly (some drugs can even stop the blisters before they appear)
- creams for treating cold sores are no good for genital or anal herpes. Clinics can tell you which creams and lotions to use.

Certain things bring on the sores, such as tiredness, stress, friction against the skin or sunbathing. If you avoid these it can cut down how often you get blisters. People with HIV are sometimes given an anti-herpes drug to take regularly to stop blisters happening.

For more information about herpes see p79.

# Warts

## How common are warts? .....

Genital and anal warts are one of the most common infections. In 2006 around 4,500 gay men were treated in clinics for them. A lot of visits to clinics are to do with warts because it can take a long time for treatment to get rid of them.

## What causes warts? .....

Anal and genital warts are caused by a virus that lives in the skin. Once you have the virus it can stay in your body for several years, but that doesn't mean you'll keep getting warts.

## What are the symptoms of warts? .....

A few weeks or many months after infection very small growths (the size of a pinhead to begin with) appear on their own or in groups. They:

- grow mostly on the head of your cock and in and around your arse
- might appear in your mouth, on your face or on other parts of your body
- are lighter in colour than the surrounding skin
- may itch and warts in the arse can bleed.

Untreated warts can spread and get bigger, sometimes becoming cauliflower-shaped.

## How are warts passed on? .....

Warts are usually passed on when someone's skin touches another person's warts; this can happen during sex.

It's also possible for the virus to be passed on when no warts are on the skin.

## How are warts prevented? .....

You can stop warts being passed on by:

- using a condom when fucking
- covering the affected area with a latex barrier during sex until the warts have been treated.

## How are warts treated? .....

If you have genital warts you must be seen by a doctor. They can't be cured with treatments from chemists that are used for warts on the hand. The sooner warts are treated, the easier they are to get rid of, so it's a good idea to check your penis regularly for warts.

Treatments are:

- freezing the warts with liquid nitrogen
- putting on a special type of acid
- using a cream.

It can take several trips to the clinic to get rid of warts. You may be given cream to put on the warts at home. If other treatments don't work, warts can be removed surgically or by laser, but this isn't common.

The wart virus lives on in the body even when the warts have gone. So they can come back and need treating again. If you have HIV, warts can be harder to treat.



# Molluscum

## How rare is molluscum? .....

Molluscum contagiosum is one of the least common infections. Over 300 gay men were treated for it in UK clinics in 2006 but many men may have gone to their doctors instead. Molluscum can affect anyone, but is more common if you have HIV.

## What causes molluscum? .....

Molluscum is caused by a virus that affects the skin and the lining of the inside of the arse and cock.

## What are the symptoms of molluscum? .....

A couple of weeks or up to six months after getting infected, pale-coloured, painless, soft, pearl-shaped growths the size of a freckle appear:

- on the skin
- inside the arse
- on the cock
- on the face.

## How is molluscum passed on? .....

Molluscum is passed on by touching the growths. This can happen during sex but molluscum can also be passed on through general touching, using other people's towels or at swimming pools.

## How is molluscum prevented? .....

You can stop molluscum being passed on by:

- not having sex until your molluscum has been treated, if it's on a part of your body people touch during sex
- not sharing towels and flannels if one of you has molluscum
- not scratching as this can spread the molluscum around your skin
- using an electric razor if you have molluscum on your face as wet shaving can spread them.

## How is molluscum treated? .....

Some doctors prefer to wait and see if the molluscum will clear up on its own after a few months. If they do decide to treat it:

- the growths can be frozen or scraped off by a doctor
- chemicals can be painted on
- a cream is sometimes used.

Treatment can take a lot of visits to the clinic, especially if you have a lot of growths.

# HIV

## How common is HIV? .....

The number of gay men with HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus) gets bigger each year. In 2006 around 2,700 gay men in the UK were told they had HIV. About one in 10 gay men who've been tested are HIV positive. This will be higher or lower depending what part of the UK you are in. In London and Brighton up to one in seven men on the gay scene have HIV. Studies show a high number of men with HIV don't realise they have it.

## What causes HIV infection? .....

HIV is a virus that weakens the immune system. Having HIV can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). This is the name given to a collection of illnesses caused when HIV damages your immune system.

## What are the symptoms of HIV infection? .....

If you're infected with HIV there are usually no symptoms straight away. But in the weeks after infection you may get a flu-like illness with any of the following symptoms:

- fever
- swollen glands
- sore throat
- a rash on the body.

*Many people don't get these. And they're also caused by lots of other common infections.*

For months or years after you get infected, HIV may cause no symptoms. But over time, you may get symptoms of infections and diseases caused by your immune system getting weaker.

## How is HIV passed on? .....

HIV is in the body fluids of an infected person. Only some fluids have enough HIV in them to infect someone. These fluids in men are:

- blood
- cum
- pre-cum
- anal mucus (the slimy lining of the inside of the arse).

Spit, sweat and piss don't have enough HIV in them to infect someone.

HIV is usually spread:

- when, during sex, an infectious body fluid gets from a person with HIV into the body (and then bloodstream) of an uninfected person
- when people who inject drugs share injecting equipment.

**HIV isn't as infectious as most other sexually transmitted infections. HIV isn't automatically passed on every time unsafe sex happens, but it could be passed on any time it happens.**

### Anal sex (fucking)

HIV is usually passed on sexually between men when they fuck without condoms.

- A man with HIV fucking an uninfected man is more likely to pass on HIV.
- An uninfected man fucking a man with HIV is less likely to (but it can still happen).
- HIV is more likely to be passed on if a man with HIV comes inside an uninfected man.

Here's how ...

### **HIV in cum**

If a man with HIV fucks an uninfected man, the virus in his cum can get into the other man's bloodstream through the lining of the arse (this lining easily absorbs the cum with HIV in it). Even if the man doing the fucking pulls out before he comes, his infected pre-cum can still pass on HIV to the other man. But cum in the arse is the riskiest thing.

### **Bleeding**

When a man is being fucked, the lining of his arse can tear a little and bleed. Blood being present makes it easier for HIV to be passed on, no matter which man has HIV or who's being fucked.

### **Oral sex (sucking)**

It's not clear how many gay men have got HIV from oral sex, but it does happen. We know the vast majority of gay men with HIV got it from unprotected fucking, with a small number getting it from sucking.

### **If you don't have HIV:**

These will reduce the risk during oral sex:

- keeping cum out of your mouth
- keeping your mouth in good shape
- avoiding oral sex if your mouth or throat is sore, damaged or infected
- paying regular visits to a GUM clinic to get checks for STIs in your mouth or throat
- if your gums bleed badly, avoiding brushing teeth before sex
- not sucking a cock that has cuts or sores on it
- using a condom for oral sex.

It probably makes little difference whether you swallow cum or spit it out.

### **And if you have HIV you can:**

- keep your cum out of men's mouths
- avoid being sucked if your cock has cuts or sores on it
- get checked for STIs in your cock and other parts of your body.

### **How is HIV infection prevented? .....**

The risk of getting or passing on HIV can be dramatically reduced by:

- using a condom and water-based lubricant for fucking
- keeping cum out of your mouth or your partner's mouth during oral sex
- taking PEP (see the next page).

Some men use extra strong condoms as they think these give more protection, but some studies show that regular condoms that straight people use are just as safe for gay men. If you want extra strong condoms here are examples:

- Mates Super Strong
- Durex Ultra Strong
- Boys Own
- HT Specials
- Safeguard Forte.

If you decide to use condoms for oral sex, flavoured ones won't taste of rubber.

### **Water-based lubricants**

Water-based lubricants make condoms less likely to break. Oil-based lubricants destroy rubber, making condoms split. Condoms shouldn't be used with oil-based lubricants like massage and baby oil, suntan lotion, skin cream, Vaseline or food products containing oil.

Instead, use water-based lubricants like:

- KY Jelly
- Liquid Silk
- Wetstuff.

**PEP (Post-exposure prophylaxis)**

If a condom breaks or you have unsafe sex, PEP is a month-long course of anti-HIV pills that can make it much less likely someone gets HIV. But PEP must be started very quickly, preferably within **24 hours** after running a risk and no later than 72 hours.

- PEP can have unpleasant side-effects, is not guaranteed to work and can be difficult to get. Sexual health/GUM clinics or hospital Accident and Emergency departments can give it but it's not always easy to get.
- PEP is not a 'morning-after pill'. You take it for four weeks.
- It is no substitute for condoms. Unlike PEP, condoms are cheap, easy to find, only need to be used during sex, have no side-effects and are very effective at stopping HIV.

For more about PEP check out [www.chapsonline.org.uk/pep](http://www.chapsonline.org.uk/pep) or call **THT direct on 0845 12 21 200**. Both can help you decide if it's worth thinking about asking for PEP.

**How is HIV infection treated? .....**

There is no vaccine or cure for HIV. But medication can lower the amount of HIV made in the body, meaning better health.

- When someone tests HIV positive doctors monitor how well their body is fighting HIV. They may not need treatment for years.
- Someone starting HIV drugs might get side effects (eg, headache, diarrhoea, nausea). These side effects can be treated and they usually get better after a few weeks anyway.

- HIV drugs work better and have fewer side effects than they did in the past.
- People diagnosed HIV positive now often only need to take one or two pills a day.
- Studies show people diagnosed soon enough (before HIV weakens their immune system) can expect to live about as long as those who don't have HIV.

**The HIV test .....**

An HIV test is usually done on a sample of your blood. HIV tests these days look for two signs of infection:

- 'antibodies' to the virus (the body makes antibodies to fight infections, but antibodies against HIV can't destroy the virus)
- 'antigen' – this is part of the HIV virus. It can be found in the blood of people who have picked up HIV in the previous few weeks (and before their body has made antibodies)

But some testing centres still use HIV tests that only look for antibodies.

**What a 'positive' HIV test result means**

If you get a 'positive' result it means:

- you are 'HIV positive' (you've been infected with HIV)
- you can infect others if you have unsafe sex.

It doesn't say anything about how your health will be in the future. It doesn't mean you have AIDS or will go on to develop AIDS.

If people know you have HIV, it might mean you'll come across hostility and prejudice.

## What a 'negative' HIV test result means

If you get a negative result it means:

- you are 'HIV negative' (you don't have HIV)

But it is possible to get a negative result when you do in fact have HIV if you test within a few weeks of getting infected (see 'How soon after taking a risk can I test?' below).

If you do something that puts you at risk of getting HIV and then get a negative test, it doesn't mean you can take risks in the future and stay uninfected. No one should believe they are immune to HIV.

## How soon after taking a risk can I test?

In the past a three month wait was recommended between a risk of getting HIV and testing. This is because it could take that long for signs of infection (antibodies) to show up in the blood. But modern tests detect HIV infections quicker, so waiting three months is no longer necessary.

A test finds signs of infection within six weeks in most people. Occasionally this takes up to three months. During that time it's possible to test 'negative' when in fact HIV is there but not showing up in a blood test. So it's recommended that someone testing 'negative' before three months have passed should take a second test a few weeks later to be sure their negative result is accurate.

When you test it's best to say when you last had unprotected sex so they know if there's a chance the test might not pick up a very recent infection.

## Whose test is it anyway?

An HIV test result is only true for the person whose blood is tested. It can be easy to hear of results given to friends, boyfriends and ex-boyfriends and be tempted to guess what that might mean for ourselves. But only by being tested yourself can you be sure whether you have HIV or not.

## Where to test?

### Genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics

The best places to have a free HIV test are GUM (sexual health) clinics.

- You can use any GUM clinic.
- Some have special times when HIV tests are done. The advantage is that results are ready sooner – sometimes on the same day or the day after.
- If you don't want to go to a special HIV testing session, you can be tested during normal clinic times.
- A clinic can tell you over the phone how they organise HIV testing and how soon you'd have your result.
- Clinics offer the most confidential way of being tested. Your GP will not be told your test result.

### Private clinics

These clinics advertise in the press and you must pay to be tested. Counselling and follow-up care often aren't provided.

### GPs (family doctors)

The advantages are:

- you might have a very good relationship with your GP
- they may be able to give you the help and support you need.

The drawbacks are:

- your doctor may not have much experience about HIV or about the issues involved in testing
- they may not give you advice and counselling before and after the test
- a GP might put on your medical records that you asked about a test, as well as any test result. This can cause problems if you apply for life insurance or a mortgage.

## HIV test results in 1 hour

It's possible to have a free HIV test and be given the result in an hour in some places. Visit [www.youchoose.org.uk](http://www.youchoose.org.uk) and click on 'testing centres' for full details of where this is available. Details of 1 hour HIV testing offered by THT centres across the country can be found by ringing **THT Direct on 0845 12 21 200** or at [www.tht.org.uk/fastest](http://www.tht.org.uk/fastest).

### HIV tests and money matters

Insurance companies now ask anyone applying for life insurance (for example, for a mortgage) if they:

- have been exposed to the risk of HIV infection in the last 5 years
- tested positive for HIV or hepatitis B or C
- ever had a sexually transmitted infection
- or injected drugs.

Saying yes will count against you when an insurance company decides if it wants to insure you. If you get insurance after not answering truthfully and this is discovered, your insurance will become invalid. The company, once it has your permission, can also ask your doctor these questions. If you refuse permission for your doctor to be contacted, this will make the company suspicious and likely to turn you down.

*So long as your result is negative, having taken an HIV test in itself will not count against you with insurance companies.*

For advice on HIV tests and financial questions call **THT Direct on 0845 12 21 200**.

### Thinking of having an HIV test?

Is there a good reason for you to test? Have you put yourself at risk of getting HIV? Having an HIV test, especially if the result is positive, can have a huge impact on your life – but so can *not* having a test.

## Finding out sooner ... or later?

Many gay men have HIV for a long time and don't realise. During this time they might give it to other people without knowing.

Also, all the time a person doesn't test, their immune system gets weaker, making it more likely they get seriously ill. When eventually they do they find out they have HIV it can be too late to really benefit from HIV treatments and there's a bigger risk they'll die. The sooner someone finds out they're HIV positive, the better their health can be monitored, helping to make decisions about treatment and taking care of themselves.

### The test... and after

Some clinics have a same-day result service, but test results usually take one or two days. They can take a week and in rural areas up to two weeks and:

- you should be offered the chance to talk things over before you take the test and after you get your result
- you should get your result face-to-face, not over the phone or by letter
- health advisers usually give test results. Whether yours is positive or negative, you can talk to them about your feelings and what you might want to do next.

To answer your questions about HIV testing call:

- **THT Direct (0845 12 21 200)**
- **gay switchboards**
- **your local gay men's health project**
- **talk to a health adviser or counsellor at a GUM clinic.**

*Talking to someone about testing doesn't mean you have to go ahead and have the test.*

PART TWO

# Check me out



## What are 'GUM clinics'?

At genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics - also called 'sexual health clinics' - you can get tested and treated for sexually transmitted infections. They're usually part of a hospital. You might also hear them called:

- STD (sexually transmitted disease) clinics
- special clinics
- sexual health clinics
- VD clinics
- clap clinics.

You can find out where your local clinic is by ringing:

- THT Direct (0845 12 21 200)
- your local gay switchboard
- your local gay men's health project
- directory enquiries.

Or you could look in the phone book under 'Genito Urinary Medicine' or 'Sexually Transmitted Disease'.

Or visit [www.tht.org.uk/howwecanhelpyou/clinics/](http://www.tht.org.uk/howwecanhelpyou/clinics/)

### Who'll know if I've been to a clinic? .....

Your confidentiality is guaranteed by law. Your GUM clinic records cannot be shown to your GP or insurance companies. But if you go to your GP first and you're referred in writing to a clinic, then the clinic sends your GP a letter saying what tests or treatment you've had. These details can go on your GP records, possibly causing problems if you later apply for a mortgage or life insurance.

You can ask your GP not to put information about your sex life in your notes.

Many gay men prefer to go straight to a GUM clinic, not their doctor, for hepatitis vaccinations, HIV tests, check-ups or treatment for STIs.

**Worried about being seen by people you know? Away from home when you need help? No problem. You can use any clinic - and don't need to be sent there by your doctor.**

## What GUM clinics can do for you

You should be able to get the following **free** at most GUM clinics:

- information and advice about having a healthy sex life
- tests and treatments for sexually transmitted infections
- someone to chat to (a health adviser) about anything on your mind
- free vaccinations against hepatitis B (and often hepatitis A)
- HIV tests with counselling before the test and after you get your result
- sexual health check-ups
- condoms and water-based lube
- special clinic times for gay men (you don't have to use these - you can also use the regular clinic times) and...
- a confidential service.



## You and your health adviser

Most clinics have health advisers or counsellors. They have experience of a wide range of problems and can spend more time with you than a doctor can. They won't tell you what to do, but they'll talk through the choices you have.

You can talk about:

- **sexually transmitted infections**
- **confidential ways of telling people you've had sex with that they may have an infection and need a check-up**
- **things on your mind about your sex life or relationships**
- **whether or not to use condoms with your regular partner**
- **sexual assault (recently or in the past) or violence in a relationship**
- **HIV testing**
- **loss of sex drive or problems getting erections**
- **relationships when one of you has HIV and the other doesn't**
- **being HIV positive**
- **choices around HIV treatments**
- **problems taking treatments.**

To chat to a health adviser you can:

- **ask for an appointment**
- **see someone without an appointment if you don't mind waiting**
- **speak to a health adviser over the phone.**

Health advisers can see couples who want to talk things through together or you can take along a friend for support. But before seeing both of you, the health adviser will usually want to see you briefly on your own first.

You can also:

- **ask to see a male or gay health adviser, if there is one**
- **see a health adviser without having to see a doctor first.**

If the clinic finds you have an infection, you may be asked to see the health adviser. This is so that you can talk about:

- **what the infection is and how it's treated**
- **how you got it and how to avoid getting it again**
- **what having it means for other people you have sex with**
- **different ways your sexual partners can be advised to have a check-up.**

Health advisers provide a confidential service. You can ask them not to put into your clinic notes the things you talk to them about.

## At the clinic

Some things may vary from clinic to clinic, but here's a rough idea what to expect.

### Getting an appointment

Clinics are usually open office hours (not weekends or Bank Holidays). So it's best to ring the clinic to ask about opening times and appointments:

- most clinics use an appointments system
- some have early evening clinics one or more days a week
- sometimes a clinic might not be able to see you for a few days or weeks.

If you have symptoms tell the receptionist as this should mean you're seen quicker.

Have you left enough time? It can take up to **four hours** to see a doctor, have tests, get results, be given treatment and talk to a health adviser.

### Before you go

Before your appointment:

- you shouldn't piss for about two to four hours as the clinic will need to take a sample of your piss when you get there. Pissing washes bacteria out of your cock, making it harder for the clinic to find signs of infections
- make a note of any medicines you're already taking – you'll be asked this at the clinic
- take something to read as there's often a lot of waiting
- think about the questions you might be asked at the clinic (see p66).

### At the clinic

At reception they'll ask if you've been before. If not, you'll need to register. You'll usually be asked for:

- your address and a phone number in case they need to contact you
- your date of birth (to stop your notes getting mixed up with someone else's)
- the name of your GP and where your GP is based, in case the clinic can't contact you in an emergency using the other details you've given.

It's OK if you don't have a GP. You don't have to give your GP's name.

## Your personal details .....

You can give a false name, but remember which name you use, as you'll have to use this name every time you visit the clinic. Giving false details isn't a good idea in case the clinic needs to get in touch with you.

You'll be given your own personal number. Your records are kept against this number, so you'll need it for future visits and phone calls to the clinic. If you lose it, the clinic can find out your number by using your name and date of birth.

## Seeing the doctor .....

When seeing the doctor, here are the kind of questions you could be asked:

- **When did you last have sex?**
- **Was it with a man or a woman? If the doctor doesn't ask this, it'd be best to mention the sex was with a man, if it was.**
- **Was this a 'regular' or 'casual' partner? (Have you had sex with this person before?)**
- **What kind of sex was it? For example sucking, fucking, wanking, rimming, and so on.**
- **How many sexual partners have you had recently?**
- **Do you know how to contact them?**
- **If you think you have an infection, what symptoms have you had and when did you notice them?**
- **Are you allergic to any medicines, such as penicillin?**
- **What medicines are you taking at the moment?**
- **Have you had any sexually transmitted infections before?**
- **Do you have any health problems generally?**

Although it can be embarrassing, giving honest answers helps the doctor know which tests or treatments you need.

Sometimes the doctor uses words to talk about sex that might not be words you use. You can use the words you feel comfortable with; the doctor will understand what you mean.

If you're asked if you've been the 'passive' or 'active' partner in anal sex, the doctor means did you do the fucking ('active') or were you fucked ('passive')? Let the doctor know if you do both or if you haven't had anal sex.

## Being examined .....

The doctor will ask you to pull your trousers and pants down so they can look for any signs of infection. The doctor may feel the glands in your groin or neck to check for swelling.

When you're dressed, the doctor will tell you what tests they want you to have. The doctor or a nurse should do the tests and explain as they go along what each test is for.

## Tests .....

- **A blood sample will be taken from your arm. This is not a test for HIV, but for syphilis done to everyone seen by GUM clinics.**
- **You will probably be asked if you'd like an HIV test. So before your visit think over whether you want to accept this offer**
- **Some clinics might want to test you for hepatitis too.**

A swab will also be taken from your mouth to check for infections like gonorrhoea.

A swab might be taken from your urethra. This may be uncomfortable for a second. Some clinics use swabs only if you have a discharge - if you don't, they might just test a sample of your piss instead.

If you're being checked for infections in your arse, a swab will be taken from there. For this:

- you lie on the bed on your side with your knees up against your chest
- wearing rubber gloves, the doctor or nurse will put some lubricating jelly around your arse hole to make taking the swab easier
- then a swab or tube (a proctoscope) will be put into your arse to take a sample.

You will also be asked for a sample of your piss. When you piss you wash signs of infection away so they cannot do this test if you've pissed within the last two to four hours. You'll be left to piss into glass containers.

## Results .....

Some test results will be ready before you leave the clinic. Other tests are sent off to a laboratory. You can usually ring the clinic for these results a week later. Some clinics won't give results over the phone and prefer people to come back to the clinic for them. HIV test results should be given in person, not over the phone or by letter.

When some of the test results are ready:

- the doctor will tell you what they've found
- if you have an infection, you'll be given medicines there and then or you'll get a prescription to take to the hospital pharmacy. These medicines are free.

Sometimes the doctor won't know whether you have an infection until the other results come back from the laboratory. You may be given medicines anyway or be asked to ring or visit the clinic later to find out what your test results are.

## Treatments .....

You'll be told how to take the medicines, and told not to have any sex with anyone until told by the clinic that the infection has gone.

**It's very important to finish the whole course of tablets, even if the symptoms go away. And never give your tablets to anyone else.**

**Depending on the treatment, the clinic might want to see you again. Sometimes the treatment doesn't work and the infection is still there, even if it seems it's cleared up.**

## Telling others you have an infection

The clinic may talk to you about other people you've had sex with. If you don't know their details, just say so. If you feel OK about people being contacted, you can do it yourself or the clinic can do it for you anonymously. It's your choice. You don't have to give anyone else's details.

If you are tested for HIV and get a positive result, the clinic may talk to you about other people you've had sex with.

## What you have a right to expect

You should expect the best treatment from GUM clinics. All of them follow guidelines about what should happen in the clinic.

You have the right to expect to:

- have your confidentiality and privacy respected
- know the name of the person treating you
- have explained to you what is being done to you and why
- be able to complain and get a reply to your complaint
- ask for a male (or female) doctor or nurse
- take someone with you when you're seeing a doctor or being treated
- ask to be treated by a different member of staff
- go to another clinic for treatment (this might not be possible for HIV treatment)
- be treated without unnecessary pain
- be seen by a doctor within a reasonable time
- not to be pressured into taking an HIV test
- be treated fairly whatever your race, HIV status, age, sexuality or what you do sexually.

### Confidentiality .....

Any information a clinic has about you must stay confidential – by law.

Your medical records and test results should stay within the GUM department and not go to other parts of the hospital without your permission.

Information about you should not be sent to your GP without your written permission (unless you were referred to the clinic in writing by your GP).

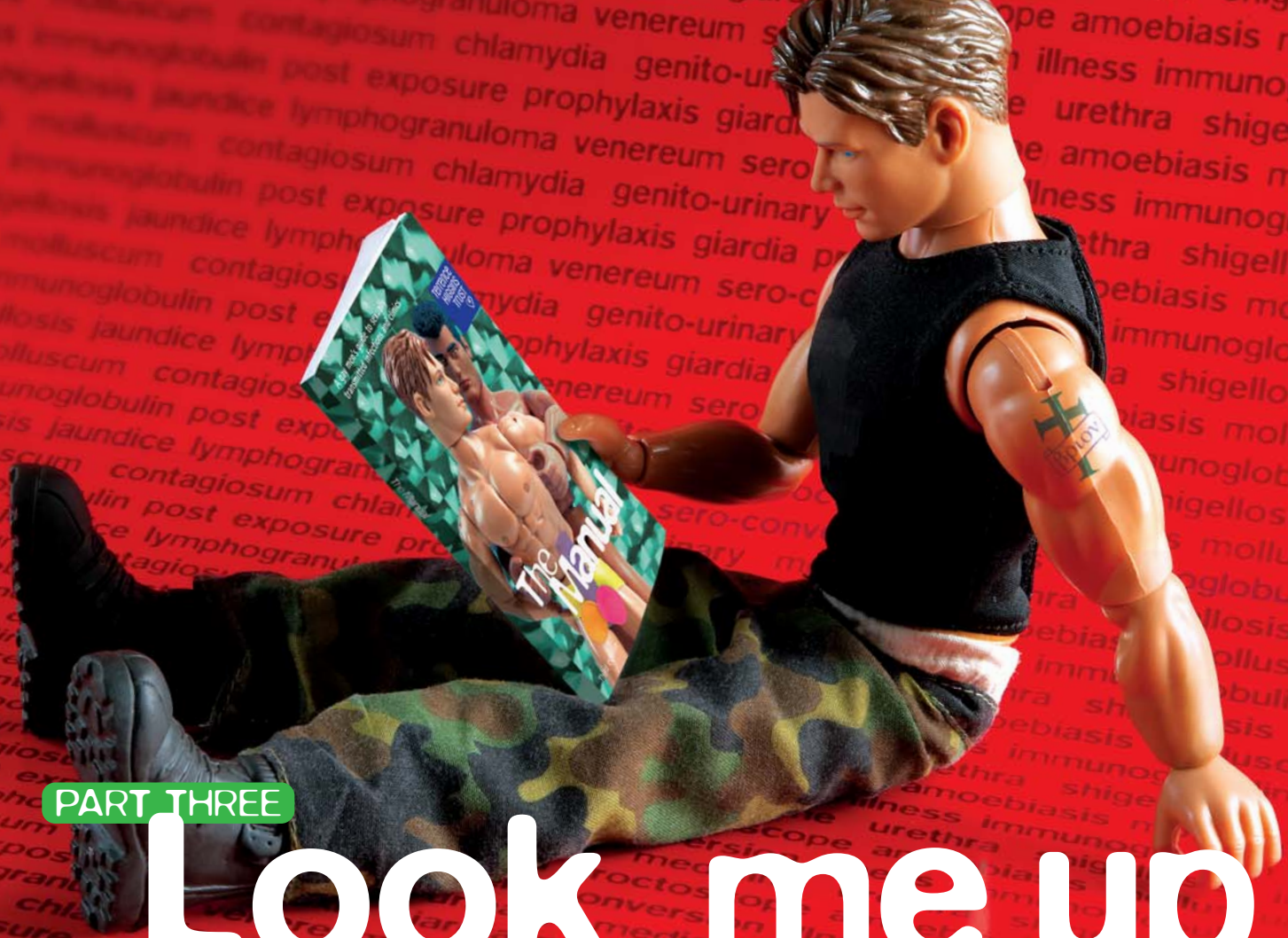
## Getting the best from your clinic

Nine out of 10 gay men say they are happy with how they are treated at GUM clinics\*. Clinic staff are trained professionals, but you might be unhappy about the service you get. Clinics can only improve if we tell them how they could be doing things better. So if you have something to say, let the clinic know, so things can change for all of us.

- Before taking your complaint elsewhere, speak to a member of staff first (sooner, rather than leaving it too long).
- Ask to see the clinic's complaints procedure.
- Some clinics have complaints phone lines or anonymous comments boxes.
- Put your complaint in a letter – the complaints procedure will tell you who to send it to. You should get an answer very quickly.
- You can make anonymous complaints, but they can only be officially acted on if you put your name to them.

For help with a complaint you can contact your local gay men's health project.

*\*Findings from over 16,000 men questioned in the 2005 National Gay Men's Sex Survey.*



PART THREE

# Look me up

**active** - when a man is the one doing the fucking, not the one being fucked.

**AIDS** - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The name given to a range of illnesses caused by someone's immune system being weakened by HIV.

**amoebiasis** - a gut infection that can be passed on during sex.

**amoebas** - small bugs that cause amoebiasis, an infection in your gut.

**antibiotics** - medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria (but which are no good against viruses).

**antibodies** - made by the body to fight infections. They show up in blood tests.

**bacteria** - germs that cause infections. Bacteria can be treated with antibiotics.

**body fluids** - in men these are: blood, cum, pre-cum, piss, sweat, tears, spit (HIV is passed on in blood, cum and pre-cum only).

**booster** - an injection to increase protection against an infection.

**candidiasis** - a name for thrush, a fungus that grows in/on the body and mouth.

**carrier** - someone who is able to pass their infection on after most other people have stopped being infectious. They may not have any symptoms of their infection.

**chancere** - (*pronounced 'shanker'*) a sore on the cock or in the mouth or arse that is often the first symptom of syphilis.

**the clap** - a name sometimes used for gonorrhoea.

**cold sore** - a herpes blister that people can get on the lips or around the mouth.

**diagnosed** - when a test shows whether someone has an infection or not.

**dildo** - a rubber sex toy, usually shaped like a cock, that can be put up someone's arse.

**discharge** - an infectious fluid that comes from a part of the body that has an infection.

**epididymitis** - inflammation in the testicles (balls), caused by an infection. This can permanently damage testicles.

**fingering** - putting a finger into someone's arse during sex or someone doing this to you.

**fisting** - putting a fist and/or forearm into another man's arse during sex or someone doing this to you.

**fungal** - to do with fungus.

**fungus** - a sort of mould that causes infections, usually in or on warm moist parts of the body such as the mouth, arse and cock.

**genital** - to do with the cock and balls.

**genitals** - a name for the cock and balls.

**giardiasis** - a gut infection that can be passed on during sex. Also called giardia (pronounced 'jardee-a').

**glands** - parts of the body's immune system that are found in the armpits, neck and groin. They can become swollen when the body is trying to fight off an infection.

**GP** - general practitioner. A name for a family doctor.

**GUM** - genito-urinary medicine, meaning 'to do with infections of the genitals and bladder'.

**health adviser** - someone working in a GUM clinic who provides information and the chance to talk confidentially about personal problems.

**hepatitis** - inflammation of the liver often caused by different viruses that can be passed on during sex.

**herpes** - infection caused by two types of the herpes simplex virus. It can be passed on during sex, often causing blisters in the arse, on the cock and around the mouth.

**HIV** - Human Immuno-deficiency Virus. A virus that slowly destroys the body's immune system.

**HIV clinic** - a special part of a hospital that treats people with HIV. It can also mean a separate time of the day when a GUM clinic carries out HIV tests.

**immune** - when someone cannot get an infection, either because they have already had it or because their immune system can stop the infection from getting a hold in their body.

**immune system** - the parts of the body that try to recognise, fight and destroy infections.

**immunoglobulin** - a vaccination giving short-lived protection against hepatitis A.

**jaundice** - when someone's skin and whites of their eyes go yellow and their shit and piss change colour. This can be a symptom of hepatitis.

**latex barrier** - rubber glove, condom or dental dam which stop viruses and bacteria getting through. You can cut up a condom into a square as a cheap alternative to a dental dam, which otherwise needs to be bought from dentist suppliers.

**lymphogranuloma venereum (LGV)** - a rare type of chlamydia bacteria that attacks the lymph glands causing painful swelling, especially in the arse and groin.

**non-gonococcal** - an infection that is not connected with the bacteria that causes gonorrhoea.

**non-specific** - when the cause of an infection isn't clear.

**non-specific urethritis (NSU)** - Inflammation of the urethra, usually caused by bacteria such as chlamydia.

**parasite** - a very small living thing that lives inside or on someone's body.

**passive** - when a man is the one being fucked, not the one doing the fucking.

**post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** - A four-week course of anti-HIV drugs that can stop HIV infecting someone as long as it is started as soon as possible after HIV has entered the body (within 72 hours). It has unpleasant side-effects, is not guaranteed to work and can be difficult to get.

**pre-cum** - the clear fluid that comes from a man's cock to lubricate it when he's sexually excited. Also called pre-ejaculate.

**primary syphilis** - the first stage of syphilis.

**proctoscope** - a metal tube used in clinics to check for infections inside the arse.

**pus** - a fluid that comes from sores or infected parts of the body. It can pass on an infection.

**recreational drugs** - 'party' drugs such as cannabis, speed, Ecstasy or cocaine.

**rimming** - licking around or putting your tongue into a man's arse hole or someone doing this to you.

**same-day testing** - when HIV test results are ready on the same day as the test was carried out.

**salmonellosis** - a gut infection caused by the salmonella bug that can be passed on during sex.

**scat** - sex that involves playing with shit.

**secondary syphilis** - the second stage of syphilis.

**sex toys** - objects such as dildos used during sex, often put inside someone's body.

**sexual partner** - someone you had sex with, either once or more than once.

**shigellosis** - a gut infection that can be passed on during sex.

**sexually transmitted disease (STD)** - means the same as STI.

**sexually transmitted infection (STI)** - means the same as STD.

**to swab** - when an object is used to collect bacteria or a virus from a part of the body.

**swab** - the object used to collect a sample of fluid or cells from a part of the body that may be infected. A swab can be a cotton bud or a small, very thin plastic stick.

**tertiary syphilis** - the third, final and most serious stage of syphilis.

**ulcer** - a sore or spot on the skin. On the genitals it could be a symptom of syphilis or herpes.

**urethra** - the 'pipe' in the cock that piss comes down.

**urethritis** - inflammation of the urethra, usually caused by bacteria. Sometimes caused by lots of sex or wanking.

**vaccination** - an injection that protects someone from getting an infection.

**venereal disease (VD)** - the old name used for infections passed on sexually.

**viral load** - the amount of HIV being produced in the body of someone with this virus.

**virus** - something that is passed from one person to another causing disease. A virus is harder to treat than bacteria and often the body has to be left to overcome the virus itself. Viruses can't be treated with antibiotics.

**water sports** - sex that involves piss.

**window period** - the time between when someone is infected with HIV and when signs of that infection (antibodies) show up in the blood. Lasts less than three months in most cases. During the window period someone can test HIV negative when they are in fact infected with HIV and very infectious.



## Useful information

If you want details of your local GUM clinics, the services they offer or you'd like to talk about HIV or other STIs you can contact:

**THT DIRECT** > 0845 12 21 200

10am to 10pm weekdays, 12noon until 6pm weekends.  
Terrence Higgins Trust helpline for information and support around HIV and sexual health.

Or email: [info@tht.org.uk](mailto:info@tht.org.uk)

### Our websites

[www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

[www.chapsonline.org.uk/infections](http://www.chapsonline.org.uk/infections)

for information about sexually transmitted infections

[www.chapsonline.org.uk/pep](http://www.chapsonline.org.uk/pep)

for info on PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis)

[www.hepinfo.org](http://www.hepinfo.org)

for info about hepatitis A, B and C

### Hepatitis C information line

0800 451 451 (10am to 10pm weekdays)

### The Hepatitis C Trust helpline

0845 223 4424

(12noon to 6pm weekdays, and until 7pm Thursday)

[www.hepCuk.info](http://www.hepCuk.info)

### British Liver Trust

[www.britishlivertrust.org.uk](http://www.britishlivertrust.org.uk) - more on hepatitis A, B and C

### Herpes Viruses Association Helpline

For information and support

0845 12 32 305 (4pm to 8pm weekdays)

[www.herpes.org.uk](http://www.herpes.org.uk) - UK site

### Herpes websites

[www.herpes.com.au](http://www.herpes.com.au) - Australian site

[www.herpes.org.nz](http://www.herpes.org.nz) - New Zealand site

### Society of Sexual Health Advisers

[www.ssha.info/public/index.asp](http://www.ssha.info/public/index.asp) - information on infections, treatments and list of all UK clinics

*Special thanks to all the staff in GUM clinics and other agencies who helped in the production of this manual.*

*All statistics in this booklet come from: the 1998 and 2000 National GMSS (Sigma Research) and the Health Protection Agency.*

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For a free copy of this manual for someone else, contact

THT DIRECT  0845 12 21 200

10am to 10pm weekdays, 12noon to 6pm weekends

or email [info@tht.org.uk](mailto:info@tht.org.uk)

**CHAPS** is a partnership of community-based organisations, co-ordinated by **Terrence Higgins Trust**, delivering HIV prevention and sexual health initiatives to gay men and bisexual men in England & Wales.

[www.tht.org.uk](http://www.tht.org.uk)

CHAPS partners:



Associate partners:



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